

ODHH Five-Year Strategic Plan

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Goal #1: Evaluate and identify gaps in state programs and services for deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Background

Under the authorizing statute of Chapter 537 of the Acts of the 2001 General Assembly, The Governor's ODHH is charged with working to increase access to educational, health and social opportunities and promoting compliance with State, local and federal laws and assisting in the development of policies to improve the lives of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The first of the Governor's Five Pillars (Fiscal Responsibility), which in 2003 involved "a series of enhancements to improve constituent services and save money," aligns with the objectives below. Effective and accessible programs and services ultimately contribute to State savings by decreasing need for long term rehabilitation, dependence on state services, and reducing potential for litigation on grounds of non-compliance.

Deaf and hard of hearing individuals have reported difficulties in accessing services provided by state agencies, with complaints specifying mental health services and other services provided through the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, to mention an example. Some complaints concern agencies with established eligibility criteria but lacking staff with the technical expertise to make an appropriate determination. The quality of and access to these services are also reported as inconsistent throughout the state.

Increased awareness training would assist agencies in developing appropriate policies and practices that will provide deaf and hard of hearing individuals' equitable access to State-funded services and to ensure effective delivery of critical services.

Objective 1.1: Collaborate with state agencies providing social services to deaf and hard of hearing individuals to identify actions needed to improved accessibility and ensure effectiveness and compliance of existing services and programs for deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Strategies

- Provide state agencies with information on the needs and issues of deaf and hard of hearing individuals.
- Review state agencies' policies and practices to determine if effective communication access and appropriate services to deaf and hard of hearing in their programs and services are in place, or in need of attention.
- Provide state agencies with technical assistance in the development of policies, regulations and programs designed to expand access to services by deaf and hard of hearing individuals.
- Educate state agencies about diverse communication needs through awareness sensitivity training.
- Recommend policy changes to State agencies as appropriate.
- Collect baseline data on public and private agencies within the state currently serving clients who are deaf, hard of hearing, and with additional disabilities.
- Develop tools for state agency personnel to use in performing needs assessments and identifying service gaps, to include an inspection checklist for public buildings.

Measurables

- **1.1.1** – Number of requests for information received
- **1.1.2** – Instances of technical assistance provided
- **1.1.3** – Number of awareness and sensitivity training sessions conducted
- **1.1.4** – Number of participants at these awareness and sensitivity training sessions
- **1.1.5** – Number of contacts with public and private entities
- **1.1.6** – Number of policies and guidelines developed or consulted on
- **1.1.7** – Number of respondents to ODHH satisfaction surveys

Goal #2: Promote awareness among public and private entities of the communication needs of deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Background

Under the authorizing statute of Chapter 537 of the Acts of the 2001 General Assembly, the Governor's ODHH is charged with increasing public awareness of the needs and issues affecting deaf and hard of hearing individuals and with advocating and coordinating the adoption of public policies, regulations and programs.

Currently there is a severe shortage of qualified sign language interpreters and real-time captionists, long recognized as a significant means of achieving communication accessibility. The scarcity of these professionals creates a severe barrier to successful service delivery, from affecting the quality of education a hard of hearing student receives in public school to the diluted to negated benefit to an individual receiving state services such as career counseling to a lack of awareness in emergencies for TV viewers. An increase in the availability of these communication access providers also would translate into greater access to existing services and participation in various facets of society such as the state justice system, healthcare, and the workforce.

Objective 2.1: Increase awareness of variations in communication needs and appropriate strategies for addressing each variation.

Strategies

- Establish a communication access workgroup involving representatives from all stakeholder groups.
- Develop a standard training curriculum and an all-purpose communication accessibility manual.
- Develop an information series, guides, and best-practices recommendations
- Develop an outreach plan targeting state agencies and public places.
- Provide State agencies and public places with education and technical assistance in enhancing communication access in programs used by deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Measurables

- **2.1.1** – Number of community outreach projects initiated
- **2.1.2** – Instances of technical assistance provided
- **2.1.3** – Development of training materials, manual, and an information series

Goal #3: Advocate for increased provision of quality educational services for deaf and hard of hearing children.

Background

The second of the Governor's Five Pillars (Education) is in line with President Bush's ambitious No Child Left Behind legislation and gives K-12 education as a priority.

The staff of The Governor's ODDH is highly knowledgeable about issues facing deaf and hard of hearing individuals. The superintendent of the Maryland School of the Deaf, a state agency that serves deaf and hard of hearing students from birth through age 21, is by law a designated ODDH Board member. Therefore, the ODDH is well-positioned to consult on educational matters concerning K-12 students who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Improved educational and transition services better enable deaf and hard of hearing students to become productive citizens as adults, participate in the workforce and contribute to the economy rather than become dependents of the State and also requiring federal resources, and enjoy a higher quality of life.

Objective 3.1: Advocate for qualified support personnel and quality support services.

Strategies

- Consult state agencies and school systems on compliance of federal and state laws & regulations and to review current initiatives for ensuring quality educational interpreting services and itinerant teachers for the deaf and hard of hearing.
- Collaborate with Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), local and state operated school systems and other key stakeholder groups in assessing the quality of current educational programs and services provided in the state of Maryland.
- Advocate for the establishment of educational programs and services for deaf and hard of hearing students who are also classified with additional disabilities such as emotionality and autism as examples.

Measurables

- **3.1.1** – Number of Special Education Statewide Advisory Committee meetings participated in
- **3.1.2** – Number of new statewide guidelines on quality assurance or the hiring process for educational interpreters developed or consulted on

Objective 3.2: Advocate for improved school-to-work transition services.

Strategies

- Collaborate with MSDE and other state agencies in assessing the state of current transition planning programs and services in Maryland.
- Promote awareness of the Governor's Transition and Youth Initiative and of funding opportunities under the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Developmental Disabilities Administration.

- Promote cooperative transition between school systems and state agencies through regularly scheduled meetings.
- Advocate for improved collaboration efforts between state agencies and school systems on the development of the individual student's transition plan.
- Advocate for the incorporation of independent living skills learning in the school curriculum.
- Promote the emphasis for higher education opportunities which will lead to increased vocational offerings for deaf and hard of hearing students.
- Promote the establishment of mentorship programs with businesses owned by deaf and hard of hearing individuals and agencies serving deaf and hard of hearing consumers for the purpose of career exploration.

Measurables

- **3.2.1** – Instances of information dissemination
- **3.2.2** – Number of businesses participating in these mentorship programs

Objective 3.3: Increase social and leadership development opportunities for deaf and hard of hearing youth.

Strategies

- Collaborate with agencies in identifying funding opportunities to establish summer programs for deaf and hard of hearing youth.
- Consult organizations providing programs and activities to youth on communication access for hard of hearing participants.
- Develop a statewide directory of recreational and educational programs accessible to deaf and hard of hearing youth.

Measurables

- **3.3.1** – Number of programs receiving funding
- **3.3.2** – Copies of directory of accessible recreational and educational programs distributed

Objective 3.4: Advocate for American Sign Language (ASL) as a viable course of study in high schools and institutions of higher education.

Strategies

- Advocate for an amendment to the current legislation to cover minimum qualifications for ASL instructors.
- Advocate for recognition from high schools and institutions of higher education of ASL courses as credits counting toward college degree requirements.
- Collaborate with MSDE along with the Chesapeake Bay American Sign Language Teacher Association in promoting training and professional development opportunities for ASL instructors with support from the Maryland State Steering Committee for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students.

Measurables

- **3.4.1** – Number of new bill proposals pertaining to ASL study
- **3.4.2** – Number of new schools offering ASL courses carrying college credit
- **3.4.3** – Number of workshops conducted

Goal #4: Consult state agencies and private entities on communication access to health care and early intervention services.

Background

The third of the Governor's Five Pillars (Health and the Environment) endeavors "to improve healthcare access for Marylanders, especially those with limited access to health insurance." Health care has long been a critical focus for senior citizens, approximately a third of whom has adult onset hearing loss, and the disabled, which encompasses deaf and hard of hearing individuals with additional conditions.

Also always a significant area within health care has been community and parent education. Access to information plays a role that cannot be understated in increasing an individual's quality of life. For deaf and hard of hearing individuals in Maryland, there needs to be increased communication access to health care service providers and better understanding of Medicare, among other concerns, which could mean less or shorter hospital stays, a decrease in unnecessary tests, fewer repetitive visits, and a lower incidence of misdiagnoses. For parents of deaf and hard of hearing newborns and children, there is a need for increased awareness on various options and their rights under state and federal law.

Objective 4.1: Advocate for the expansion of existing state legislation on hearing aids.

Strategies

- Collaborate with MSDE in promoting hearing aid loan programs in the state.
- Study the feasibility of legislation stating that only licensed audiologists and otolaryngologists may prescribe hearing aids.
- Explore ways for insurance companies to cover the cost of hearing aids and cochlear implants along with subsequent speech therapy.
- Develop a dialogue with legislators to amend current legislation on insurance coverage of hearing aids to include individuals 18 years of age and above.

Measurables

- **4.1.1** – Number of bills proposing amendments to existing State legislation on hearing aids

Objective 4.2: Promote quality early identification and intervention services and increased parent participation in intervention programs.

Strategies

- Participate in the Universal Newborn Screening for Deafness Advisory Committee meetings.
- Collaborate with state agencies and experts in providing technical consultation to early intervention programs to ensure comprehensive and appropriate information delivery and compliance with federal and state laws and regulations.
- Develop partnerships with early intervention programs, and conduct site visits and meet with administrators, service providers, and parents.
- Participate in pertinent statewide committee meetings.

Measurables

- **4.2.1** – Number of Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Advisory Committee meetings participated in
- **4.2.2** – Number of site visits

Objective 4.3: Promote communication access for managed care and private services.

Strategies

- Provide training for all health care personnel on how to communicate with deaf and hard of hearing individuals and appropriate auxiliary aids.
- Study previously failed legislation proposing recognition of interpreting costs as a medically related expense and determine whether to revive these bill proposals.
- Consult managed care organizations and the Maryland Medical Chirurgical Society (Med-Chi) represents the Maryland physicians on the provision of interpreting services.
- Establish a task force to investigate ways to provide interpreting services, including hiring staff interpreters and employing video conferencing technology.

Measurables

- **4.3.1** – Number of hospitals identified as needing training
- **4.3.2** – Number of training sessions conducted
- **4.3.3** – Report from task force study produced
- **4.3.4** – Study report on failed legislation produced
- **4.3.5** – Number of new policies and guidelines for hospitals developed or consulted on

Goal #5: Promote awareness among state agencies of the communication needs of deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the judicial system.

Background

The fourth of the Governor's Five Pillars, Public Safety and Safer Neighborhoods, identifies access to justice as a priority. In ensuring this access for the deaf and hard of hearing population of Maryland, communication access has a critical role.

Equal participation depends on effective communication, but the state judiciary personnel agencies may not be familiar with strategies and existing technologies suiting individuals with various communication needs—from profound deafness and dependence on sign language to residual speech ability and dependence on assistive listening devices—and do not know where to go for information. This is likewise a barrier to successful service delivery from state agencies and private service providers in the State of Maryland.

Increased awareness and sensitivity to the various communication needs would lead to an equitable justice system for deaf and hard of hearing individuals extending to increased participation from jurors and attorneys with hearing loss, and could prevent future litigation.

Objective 5.1: Coordinate and provide training on access strategies for state justice personnel.

Strategies

- Compile baseline data on interpreters certified to practice in legal settings and training opportunities for interpreting legal proceedings.
- Develop a comprehensive communication access training curriculum.
- Collaborate with courts in promoting training on communication access in legal settings to attorneys, to be counted toward Continuing Legal Education requirements.
- Advocate for improved communication access for inmates at all levels of the state criminal justice system.
- Provide training to state justice personnel on communication access, assistive technologies, hearing loss, deaf culture, and deafblindness.

Measurables

- **5.1.1** – Instances of new policies and guidelines developed or consulted on
- **5.1.2** – Number of training sessions provided

Objective 5.2: Increase access to the judiciary system for deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Strategies

- Promote awareness statues pertinent to interpreter access among state court personnel and the state attorney office.
- Collaborate with counties in ensuring a current directory of interpreters certified for legal settings.
- Advocate for the inclusion of language compelling provision of interpreters for deaf parents of an adult involved in state legal proceedings, if requested for.

- Develop a directory of social and rehabilitative services accessible to deaf and hard of hearing individuals for judges and attorneys.
- Increase awareness among court advocates regarding sign language, deaf culture, and communication challenges facing deaf and hard of hearing individuals.
- Conduct communication awareness and sensitivity training sessions for judges on appropriate accommodations.
- Conduct a feasibility study on a centralized funding pool for communication access services in all aspects of the criminal justice system.
- Advocate for the establishment of a funding source to cover communication access needs for deaf and hard of hearing individuals enrolled in court-ordered programs.

Measurables

- **5.2.1** – Number of new policies and guidelines developed or consulted on
- **5.2.2** – Number of training sessions provided
- **5.2.3** – Copies of directory on accessible social and rehabilitative services distributed
- **5.2.4** – Establishment of a permanent funding source

Goal #6: Advocate for increased employment opportunities for deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Background

The fifth of the Governor's Five Pillars (Commerce) puts forth economic development as a critical focus. This also includes investing in programs "focused on assisting small and minority businesses." Under the authorizing statute of Chapter 537 of the Acts of the 2001 General Assembly, the Governor's ODDH is charged with working to eliminate underemployment and unemployment.

These two directives from the State jointly state the need for increased workforce participation from deaf and hard of hearing Marylanders. Research has shown that 70 percent of Marylanders with disabilities are unemployed. Those who are employed are under-employed, often making half the wages of their non-disabled peers. With little or no earned income, people with disabilities consume state services and are unable to become tax-paying citizens. Increased employment opportunities for able deaf and hard of hearing individuals can be in part achieved through appropriate public policy reform in regards to disability hiring and improved employment services.

Objective 6.1: Consult state agencies on promoting and proposing incentives leading to employment opportunities for deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Strategies

- Promote the State's Quest Internship program leading to full employment for individuals with disabilities, including deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the state government.
- Promote the establishment of a state program similar to the Federal Schedule A program to employ individuals with disabilities, including deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the state government.
- Collaborate with appropriate state agencies in compiling and disseminate information on available tax incentives to businesses, to include spending on accommodations.
- Provide technical consultation to state agencies and disability- and minority-owned business leadership networks on issues related to deaf and hard of hearing individuals.
- Promote better placement opportunities and welfare-to-work incentives as to encourage deaf and hard of hearing individuals to opt for employment.

Measurables

- **6.1.1** – Instances of technical assistance provided

Objective 6.2: Consult state agencies and private entities on increasing employment assistance for deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Strategies

- Advocate for walk-in access at One-Stop Centers, including the installation and usage of TTYs, video relay system and assistive listening devices, readily available interpreters for workshops and meetings with counselors and trained staff with awareness sensitivity on the needs of deaf and hard of hearing individuals including basic sign language skills for greetings and assistance.

- Develop a training curriculum on the various needs of deaf and hard of hearing business owners in conjunction with programs promoting minority and disability business opportunities.
- Develop and implement an outreach plan.

Measurables

- **6.2.1** – Number of training sessions provided
- **6.2.2** – Instances of new policies and guidelines developed or consulted on
- **6.2.3** – Number of outreach activities conducted

Objective 6.3: Encourage businesses owned by deaf and hard of hearing individuals to register as vendors with the State of Maryland.

Strategies

- Ensure state rules and regulations incorporate provisions for disability participation in the state's minority business program.
- Promote awareness of the state's minority business program for contractual services.
- Promote businesses owned by deaf and hard of hearing individuals to participate in training opportunities provided by the State of Maryland.

Measurables

- **6.3.1** – Number of deaf and hard of hearing individuals/companies participating in the state's minority business program as state vendors
- **6.3.2** – Number of businesses owned by deaf and hard of hearing individuals participating in these trainings

Goal #7: Consult public and private entities on improving emergency communication to deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Background

Under the authorizing statute of Chapter 537 of the Acts of the 2001 General Assembly, the Governor's ODHH is charged with working with State and local agencies to ensure information access for deaf and hard of hearing individuals to safety and emergency services and the statewide distribution of visual smoke detectors.

In advocating for the general welfare of individuals in Maryland who are deaf or hard of hearing, ODHH has found communication from first responders to emergencies and information access to emergency alerts to be at inadequate levels where deaf and hard of hearing individuals are concerned. The proposed objectives are designed to heighten the sense of safety and awareness of emergency situations; increase awareness of emergency plans, procedures and guidelines; and increase the availability of safety tools and equipment to the deaf and hard of hearing individuals, such as mobile communications devices and alternative technologies allowing for the receipt of alerts and transmittal of urgent information.

During times of emergency, deaf and hard of hearing individuals are often left without essential knowledge and therefore become dependents on public officials and, in severe circumstances, carry the risk of becoming liabilities. Simple adaptations and special considerations in the design of emergency response can radically transform these individuals into independent, even contributing citizens.

Objective 7.1: Promote access to smoke detectors specially designed for deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind individuals.

Strategies

- Educate distributors and consumers on how to ensure equipment appropriateness and compliance with the fire code.
- Promote and develop outreach plan to educate deaf and hard of hearing people about the availability of the smoke detector distribution program.
- Advocate for permanent program funding.
- Include vibracalls and silent paging systems for deaf-blind individuals in the smoke detector distribution program.
- Meet with the Governor's Smoke Detector Program Committee to review the systematic process as well as to increase funds and publicity for the smoke detector distribution program.

Measurables

- 7.1.1 – Number of applications for visual smoke detectors received
- 7.1.2 – Number of applications for visual smoke detectors verified
- 7.1.3 – Establishment of a permanent program funding
- 7.1.4 – Number of workshops conducted
- 7.1.5 – Number of new smoke detectors added to the distribution program

Objective: 7.2: Increase consumer awareness of access strategies and emergency responder awareness of communication strategies.

Strategies

- Promote the development of access from wireless communications devices to 9-1-1 and other emergency services.
- Provide ongoing training to all 9-1-1 personnel as to ensure timely and appropriate emergency response from telecommunications relay service users.
- Promote awareness of emerging telecommunications technologies among deaf and hard of hearing individuals and emergency responders.
- Educate deaf and hard of hearing individuals on alternative methods for contacting emergency services.
- Collaborate with appropriate state agencies in ensuring roadside access to emergency assistance.
- Participate on the Emergency Preparedness & Response for Individuals with Disabilities and Other Unique Needs Statewide Advisory Committee and advise on issues related to deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Measurables

- 7.2.1 – Number of meetings participated in
- 7.2.2 – Number of training sessions provided
- 7.2.3 – Number of roadside emergency assistance devices installed

Objective 7.3: Advocate for improved access to emergency broadcasts.

Strategies

- Establish an advisory committee to assess current situations and recommend improvements.
- Establish a dialogue between broadcasters, captioning service providers, and advocacy organizations on minimum performance standards and provision of real-time captioning of all news reports on all local channels.
- Collaborate with TV stations in improving the placement of scrolling announcements so that they are not obscured by closed captioning.
- Promote community awareness on avenues for complaint and feedback on captioning provision.
- Identify and perform cost analyses for alternative means of receiving emergency alerts.
- Investigate technologies enabling text announcements in car radios and funding possibilities for statewide distribution.
- Increase highway signage for upcoming road conditions and incidents.
- Work toward 5-1-1 access for deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Measurables

- 7.3.1 – Report from advisory committee meetings produced
- 7.3.2 – Number of meetings participated in
- 7.3.3 – Responses to satisfaction survey collected
- 7.3.4 – Instances of new highway signage

Objective 7.4: Partner with agencies responsible for emergency management.

Strategies

- Develop a directory of interpreters qualified and equipped to work in emergency settings.
- Advocate for the classification of the Relay Operator as essential emergency personnel.
- Collaborate with emergency services providers in ensuring communication access in emergency procedures.
- Compile information on and inform deaf and hard of hearing individuals of existing emergency alerting services.
- Collaborate with emergency services providers in educating deaf and hard of hearing individuals on emergency procedures, guidelines, preventive measures, and equipment.
- Foster interaction between emergency services providers and the deaf and hard of hearing community.
- Advocate for first responders who are fluent in ASL.

Measurables

- 7.4.1 – Copies of directory of qualified interpreters distributed
- 7.4.2 – Instances of new policies and guidelines developed or consulted on
- 7.4.3 – Number of workshops conducted
- 7.4.4 – Number of workshop participants
- 7.4.5 – Number of outreach activities conducted

Goal #8: Promote awareness of the Governor's ODHH as the state resource for information and referral on issues affecting deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Background

Under the authorizing statute of Chapter 537 of the Acts of the 2001 General Assembly, the Governor's ODHH is charged with serving as an information clearinghouse on the needs and issues affecting deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Established in October 2001, the ODHH is a relatively new agency and therefore needs to promote awareness and increase its visibility, to both consumers and among state agencies. This has a direct impact on the future performance of the ODHH in increasing awareness of the needs of deaf and hard of hearing Marylanders and the fulfillment of its mission statement, "[To] provide expertise related to deaf and hard of hearing issues to Maryland citizens and to facilitate their ability to access resources and services."

Objective 8.1: Increase awareness of the information and referral service of the Governor's ODHH.

Strategies

- Develop video-based and print-based information materials on ODHH.
- Conduct community outreach efforts to inform deaf and hard of hearing individuals about ODHH.
- Participate in various statewide committees, advisory groups, task force groups, and workgroups regarding deaf and hard of hearing issues.
- Develop a statewide referral directory of services listing organizations and agencies that provide services for deaf and hard of hearing individuals.
- Design and launch a website functioning as a one-stop resource providing information on State programs and services available to deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Measurables

- **8.1.1** – Number of requests for assistance received
- **8.1.2** – Instances of assistance provided
- **8.1.3** – Instances of community outreach activities conducted
- **8.1.4** – Number of contacts developed at these outreach activities
- **8.1.5** – Number of ODHH website hits

Objective 8.2: Ensure timely responses to requests for information.

Strategies

- Design a database to track inquiries and responses.
- Monitor the effectiveness and efficiency of staff responses.

Measurables

- **8.2.1** – Number of email and phone inquiries received
- **8.2.2** – Percentage of email and phone inquiries responded to within one business day
- **8.2.3** – Number of written inquiries received
- **8.2.4** – Percentage of written inquiries responded to within 10 business days
- **8.2.5** – Number of written inquiries received through the Governor's Office
- **8.2.6** – Percentage of letters received through the Governor's Office responded to within a three-week period

Goal #9: Increase civic and community involvement among deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Background

Under the authorizing statute of Chapter 537 of the Acts of the 2001 General Assembly, the Governor's ODHH is charged with advocating for and coordinating the adoption of public policies, regulations, and programs designed to improve the quality of life for deaf and hard of hearing Marylanders.

There are an estimated 550,000 deaf and hard of hearing Marylanders, a figure not reflected on the composition of numerous advisory and policymaking entities such as boards, task forces, and committees that serve their population.

Dependence onto state resources increases the likelihood of ongoing re-education. If consumers were adequately informed and able to effectively represent themselves and their communities, they could be able to take proactive action in information sharing, educating amongst themselves and also the service providers they come into contact with, and themselves become collaborators in achieving needs resolution.

Opportunities need to be created for representation. This would bring positive change to service delivery, through providing for comprehensive policymaking and the incorporation of existing resources for deaf and hard of hearing consumers. Communication avenues to deaf and hard of hearing consumers would be maximized, attaining two-way efficiency and enabling information sharing among consumers and input for service providers.

Objective 9.1: Increase representation from the deaf and hard of hearing community on advisory and policy-making entities at all levels.

Strategies

- Compile baseline data on the number of deaf and hard of hearing representation on state advisory and policy-making boards, committees, task forces, and related entities.
- Collaborate with state, county, and local agencies in creating opportunities for the inclusion of individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf and hard of hearing with additional disabilities in advisory and policy-making roles.
- Develop a resource list of potential qualified deaf and hard of hearing individuals.
- Develop a resource list of individuals willing to mentor interested deaf and hard of hearing individuals to serve on advisory bodies, particularly for rural areas.
- Conduct community outreach activities to inform deaf and hard of hearing individuals of opportunities to serve on available advisory and policy-making boards as appropriate.
- Provide training to deaf and hard of hearing individuals on how to effectively serve in an advisory role.

Measurables

- **9.1.1** – Number of advisory and policy-making entities with deaf or hard of hearing representatives
- **9.1.2** – Number of deaf and hard of hearing representatives serving on advisory and policy-making entities
- **9.1.3** – Instances of community outreach activities conducted
- **9.1.4** – Number of training sessions provided
- **9.1.5** – Number of participants in these training sessions

Objective 9.2: Increase advocacy skills and awareness of accessibility laws among consumers.

Strategies

- Provide training on community advocacy and self advocacy.
- Provide workshops on accessibility laws.

Measurables

- **9.2.1** – Number of workshops conducted
- **9.2.2** – Number of workshop participants

Objective 9.3: Strengthen communication between the Governor's ODHH and stakeholder communities.

Strategies

- Coordinate regular ODHH town hall forums.
- Develop public relations mechanisms for ODHH communication with stakeholder communities and individual constituents.
- Create a town hall schedule ensuring a minimum of two town hall meetings a year and a site rotational plan across the state of Maryland.
- Develop and maintain an email listserv and a database of addresses for the dissemination of notices and publications.
- Attend consumer group meetings on a regular basis for the purpose of obtaining feedback on the progress of the ODHH and other State agencies.
- Collaborate with appropriate State agencies in disseminating news and notices to the deaf and hard of hearing community.
- Cultivate relationships with State legislators.
- Provide communication access services to deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Measurables

- **9.3.1** – Number of invitations to meetings received
- **9.3.2** – Number of community activities/meetings participated in
- **9.3.3** – Number of ODHH town hall meetings hosted
- **9.3.4** – Number of participants at ODHH town hall meetings
- **9.3.5** – Number of hours of communication access services provided
- **9.3.6** – Number of individuals receiving these communication access services

Goal #10: Promote public awareness of and access to assistive technology.

Background

The passage of the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 mandated telecommunications access for disabled citizens throughout the country, which was achieved with the state relay service. Although deaf consumers are familiar with the availability of this service, late-deafened adults and the general public are still for the most part unaware, a consequence of which is businesses hanging up on calls placed through the relay service with the mistaken assumption that it is telemarketing, thereby denying deaf customers access and adversely impacting their own bottom line.

Yet another area of concern is consumer understanding, as innovations and trends have transformed the telecommunications industry in recent years and brought new options along with uncertainty and need for consumer education and training.

Objective 10.1: Advocate for increased access to telecommunications devices and other assistive technologies.

Strategies

- Communicate with appropriate state agencies and key elected officials about the critical need for additional funding in order to broaden eligibility for the TTY distribution program to deaf and hard of hearing individuals of all income brackets.
- Advocate for the TTY distribution program utilization of contracted agents to increase vendor access in rural areas.
- Promote for the inclusion of recent technological advancements in the TTY distribution program, such as captioned telephones (CapTel), voice carryover telephones, wireless communications devices, telebrailles, and video cameras for video relay service access.
- Establish a dialogue with phone companies to comply with ADA requirements to install TTY pay phones in public places and to conduct regular inspections to ensure workability.
- Promote the TTY distribution program by providing hands-on equipment demonstrations at community events throughout the state.
- Provide technical assistance to state agencies on the purchase of Assistive Listening Devices and other appropriate assistive technologies.
- Promote the establishment of a statewide equipment loaner program of purchased, used, and donated devices.

Measurables

- **10.1.1** – Establishment of new policies, regulations and guidelines raising income threshold or eliminating minimum income requirements for eligibility
- **10.1.2** – Number of new state vendors participating in the TTY distribution program
- **10.1.3** – Number of new devices added to the TTY distribution program
- **10.1.4** – Number of demonstrations at community events conducted
- **10.1.5** – Instances of technical assistance provided

- **10.1.6** – Establishment of statewide equipment loaner program of purchased, used and donated devices
- **10.1.7** – Number of TTY equipment distributed
- **10.1.8** – Number of training sessions provided

Objective 10.2: Promote awareness of the state relay service.

Strategies

- Participate in the outreach plan targeting both deaf and hard of hearing consumers and the general public and private businesses coordinated by Telecommunications Access of Maryland.
- Study the effectiveness of the current script of the relay call announcement.

Measurables

- **10.2.1** – Number of outreach activities participated in